a Dedorn Dog Book 2/6

Stories by A Gold Star Secret & friends: Volume 2

Geoff Towner

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DEAD LOVE SONGS

(1999-2005)

KEEP AWAY FROM TORTURED ARTISTS

Didn't you hear your best friend
in warnin' late last night?
"Stay away from those men
or you're askin' for a fight".
It was for your own good,
but it doesn't make it right,
'cause you did what you should
and you saved the poor boy's life.

Next time you'll know better
to keep away from them,
'cause tortured artists can
fuck you up with the best of them.

Shoulda heard your best friend
but what were you to do?
Always tears in the end
and the Hell that they go through.
But you did something good
and you showed the kid some truth,
'cause you did what you could
even if you weren't s'posed to.

Next time you'll know better
to keep away from them,
'cause tortured artists can
fuck you up with the best of them.
Next time you'll fare better.
Keep away from them forever,
'cause they can't ever be together
with anyone long.

The songs on this album tell a story from beginning to end.
Easily the most autobiographical work I've ever done,
it's all (mostly) based on true events and nothing is wrapped in allegory.
It's brutally honest. Too honest, in retrospect.
The title is based on a conversation between Anna Sarris and I,
about the singer in a certain high profile indie rock band. The rest is about
someone who showed kindness to me when maybe they shouldn't have.
Original working title was "The Worst Week Of My Life".

SELFLESS

You glow like a lantern
and it rubs off when you're around.
Reassure I'm not a phantom,
dig my heart out of the ground.
You shine like a diamond
and it fills me with a song.
Reassure I'm not an island,
this hasn't happened in oh, so long.

You make me wanna be selfless,
an emotion all brand new.
You make me wanna be selfless,
and that, I ain't used to.

You hold me like a bear trap
and the masochist in me wears a smile.
Reassure I'm not a Rorschach,
'cause the mystery's been absent for quite a while.

You make me wanna be selfless,
an emotion all brand new.
You make me wanna be selfless,
and that, I ain't used to.

The first in a not-so-long line of intentional "-less" songs.
(See also: Heartless, Helpless As I Am,
The Restless United, etc.)
This details the bubble of happiness that
comes after the events of the preceding song,
but obviously bubble's burst....

TERMINAL

"Wake up!"
Girl, it's not your make-up
that's keepin' me from leavin'
when it's runnin'
in the mornin'.
"Shape up
or ship out. It's break-up
time". You said it'd never
happen, ever.
You said "forever".

Why is it so?
"It's because you touch and go".

...And the bubble bursts.
Not "exactly" how the split played out,
but poetic license comes into effect to make it a song
I hoped (at the time) was worth hearing.
The rhythm of the first lines & the initial melody
was based on Low's song "Venus".
"Touch and go" obviously references the record label.
The title "Terminal" has dual meaning:
both the "end" or "death" motifs,
but more importantly highlighting the fact that
the Girl in the song worked in the airline industry.
The initial working title was "Fight Or Flight".

HEARTLESS

How'd you get to be so heartless?
Eyes cold with fear, far from the fire
that got us acting like partners,
and I never felt so high.
You never used to be so heartless!
Eyes free from fear, burnin' with desire,
but then you got lost in the darkness,
sayin' that everything dies.

The cold war begins,
and I'm payin' for someone else's sins.
I'm sick of playin' the victim!
I wanna know.
I wanna know why you have to be so heartless.

And how does one become so heartless?
No sign of tears, no sign of cryin'
when you're facin' such disasters
as hard as yours and mine.
I don't wanna get so heartless.
Been there for years, I'm crossin' that line
and steppin' out from the darkness,
'cause I never felt so tired.

The cold war begins,
and I'm payin' for someone else's sins.
I'm sick of playin' the victim!
I wanna know.
I wanna know why you have to be so heartless.

An angry song. A mean spirited song, in retrospect.
A song born of pure raw emotion:
is it an appropriate first response to the events of the preceding song?
There is the slight hint of redemptive hope toward the end though.
The second line references the "eyes like fire"
in "The Observationist" from the previous album,
possibly my first attempt at "world building" within songs.
NOTE: The next song on the album, "It Kills Me That We Can't Be",
is an instrumental designed to emulate the "sinking in"
of what has happened: from anger, to reflection... to sadness.

NOTHING

Wanting some of your affection.
Needing some of your attention,
but I don't exist.
Wanting just a piece of action,
feeding a sense of self-satisfaction...
but why do I persist?

I see you lookin' but you don't see me,
then you took off and you let me be.
Now I've given up the ghost this time,
'cause I guessed that the spectre's mine.

I am nothing in your eyes.
I am nothing, if not despised.
It's about time I realised
I am nothing in your eyes.

I am nothing.

The utter sadness that comes after anger and reflection.
After one show we did at the Hopetoun,
my mate Scott came up to me and said,
"I had a friend here but they had to leave.
They'd just broken up with someone and it was too much".
I responded with something like
"that's the best thing that's ever happened at one of our gigs!"
I like to entertain the idea that it was
THIS song that pushed them out the door.
The line with "spectre" in it is a reference to
A Gold Star Spectre, the initial idea for the band name.
The original title was the slightly longer "I Am Nothing".

COUPLES

I've been watching couples
fuckin' like rabbits,
enforcin' bad habits in me.
Always young and supple,
attractin' like magnets.
It brings out the addict in me.

Say what you want, it doesn't really matter.
Say what you want.

I'm still getting tingles
whenever you touch me,
I know it's not healthy to say.
When you're terminally single
and stuck on the dark side,
you have to let your heart slide away.

Say what you want, it doesn't really matter.
Say what you want, it's inconsequential.
Say what you want, it doesn't really matter.
Say what you want...

...'cause it won't go away,
and it fucks with my head.
Watchin' two-by-two every day
makes you feel not much more than dead.

A song with a bit of dual meaning.
Watching "couples" in both the sense of
seeing twosomes everywhere you go when you are out.
And also in the sense of sinking to the depths of
lonesome pornography when you stay in.
The "terminally single" line is an intended reference
to the song "Terminal", appearing earlier on the album,
as is the "dark side" and its connection
to the "darkness" in "Heartless"
Musically the song owes a debt to Tarnation's "The Well"
and the Black Heart Procession.

CASUALTY

Sometimes you just wanna be touched.
Sometimes it's nice just to be held.
Just like a draggin' ball and chain,
there's always some shit that remains.

Sometimes life's a little bit rough.
Sometimes life's nothin' but Hell.
Just like a dragon slayer and his holy name,
you hope that some shit stays the same.

Most things often end abrupt:
as relationships, they can tell.
In a modernist society, nothin' stays.
I hate this disposable age.

I guess you gotta roll with the punches.
You gotta be plastic as well.
To survive these crazy times and still be sane,
detach yourself from your brain.

All right, c'mon hold tight.
Baby, make me your casualty.

It's about the possibility of having "no strings"
casual sex after the end of a relationship,
hoping for any kind of intimacy with the one who ended things,
even if it's meaningless.
The verses are as confusing as fuck though,
slightly touching on political issues which I should stay away from.
The chorus is meant to invoke the "up" vibe of J. Geils Band's
"Centerfold", following on from the illicit themes of "Couples".
The use of "touch" also intentionally connects
this song and the preceding one.

SILVER LINING

Can't understand
why somethin' beautiful has to end
when it's just beginning.
How come you said,
"Never felt like this before with my head
and my body more than willing"?
It hurts inside,
knowin' that a piece of you's denyin' yourself,
but I gotta start fightin' it

and stop myself from being a bastard,
just to avoid a potential disaster
and have you hating me, hating you, hating me
(and God, it's enough with the suicide dreams).
And you see that dark cloud circlin' my head?
One day I'll be strong enough to rip it to shreds,
but 'til then I'll keep searchin' up at the sun that's shinin',
hands outstretched,
lookin' for a silver linin'.

I'm lookin' for a silver linin'.

When do I start feelin' happier?
When do I start feelin' happy?

Another semi-strangely structured song,
with a big instrumental Art Of Fighting styled intro.
Sad as fuck, but with a promise of redemption (again)
and a little kicker at the end
(like eating the carrot that you've been leading your donkey with).
But yeah, it's about having difficulty grasping
and accepting the reality of the situation,
but endeavouring to get through "The Sadness"
and out the other side.
I kinda like the positivity of this song
(which is highly unusual).

JEALOUSY, MY ENEMY

Jealousy, I name you my enemy.
You've been my friend too long.
Can't you see? It alters my reality,
so I can't tell right from wrong.

Won't be long 'til you're comin' home,
then I can hold you in my arms.
Somethin's wrong when your light is still on.
I just wanna hold you in my arms.

Entropy, I know it's killin' me,
singin' its sweet death song.
Now I see. You smell the fear on me,
knowin' I'll never be strong.

Won't be long 'til you're comin' home,
then I can hold you in my arms.
Somethin's wrong when your light is still on.
I just wanna hold you in my arms.
Won't be long 'til you're gone,
and then I'll miss holdin' you in my arms.
Somethin's wrong when y'hang up the phone.
I just miss holdin' you in my arms.

Imagine breaking up with someone,
and then they move into your shared house
(and they sleep in the room beneath you),
and they start a new relationship,
so they sometimes don't come home,
but they ARE gonna move out... sometime... eventually...
(but all you wanna do is hold them... but you can't)... Sigh.
The bit about entropy's deatb song is a slight nod to the Velvet Underground.
el Mopa were at Velvet Studios recording a song for a QSR compilation
and Skunkhour's Fender Rhodes was in the bass room.
Bon had his 4-track recorder with him
so we quickly used the Rhodes for this.
This song was also intended for the unreleased "This Gift" compilation
on Quietly Suburban Records, but ended up on "Dead Love Songs".

ARALDITE ME, APHRODITE

The first time I saw your eyes.
You took me by surprise.
The second time I saw your smile.
It made it all worthwhile.

This was totally unexpected.
Who'da thought we'd ever connect? Yeah, wow.
But it makes sense somehow.

The third time I felt your touch.
It almost made me blush.
The fourth time I felt your kiss.
It's somethin' I sure missed.

This was totally unexpected.
Who'da thought we'd ever connect? Yeah, wow.
But it makes sense somehow.

I'm on cloud nine all the time.
Too much, too much fun
is never enough for anyone.
It's a Godsend, not a crime.

And it makes sense somehow,
that we connect, yeah, wow.
And it makes sense somehow,
this unexpected vow.
And it makes sense somehow.

Bon's music and my lyrics, and it's the only time we've really collaborated that way for a song, except for the jammy stuff etc. Obviously still riding the crest of the positivity wave that follows on from "Kinetic", this "happy song" probably marked the beginning of a long period of incoming writer's block fuelled solely by self-doubt: "If I'm not sad, how can I write good songs?" The rhythm of the lyrics in the chorus is a reference to Thunderclap Newman's "Something In The Air", which is the first time I intentionally did that so openly. If it's good enough for You Am I... This was also originally meant for "N,R & G" but it found a home on Bon's solo album "Zee Beep Ape" by The Baby Bees.

EVERYTHING

I know you come from a
higher pedigree,
an' I'm hopelessly blue collar,
right down to the bone,
but when we're alone
there's sparkles in the air.

And all I wanna do
is give you the world,
but all I got in my pocket is change and a docket:
not enough for this beautiful girl.
You are the words that I sing, the chords that I wring,
you are my everything.
You are the beers that I sink, the calls in the morning
and everything.

It ain't justice, I ain't good enough.
It ain't rough stuff, I ain't fit to touch.
Some say, a pure heart, yeah, that's all it takes,
but some say, that's the easiest way for it to
break and break and break and break
and break and break and break and break
and break and break and break and break
and break and break and break and break
and break and break and break and break
and break and break embrace embrace
embrace embrace EMBRACE EMBRACE
EMBRACE EMBRACE EMBRACE EMBRACE!

I wrote this song for a good friend,
with whom I had momentarily entertained the idea
of starting a relationship with after "coming out the other side"
but I felt I would ultimately be punching above my weight.
And so I wrote this instead.
It was highly influenced by Darren Hanlon's "Falling Aeroplanes"
and it reminds me of the Emu Cafe in Newtown, where we played together.
It's the first in a long-ish line of songs about writing songs.
Another song meant to be on "N, R & G"
but released on "Dead Love Songs".

ONE ON ONE

“He’s gotta want to.
He’s gotta want it like a flood,
‘cause I’ve been fucked around,
I’m sick of seein’ blood.
He’s gotta want me
and he’s gotta want JUST me.
If he has other women,
then his teeth will see my knee.”

She’s gotta want to.
She’s gotta want me for who I am,
‘cause I’ve been one hell of
a callous, bastard man.
She’s gotta want me
and I’ll treat her like a queen.
If she deceives me,
I’ll cover her in gasoline.

Yeah we each subscribe to
our sordid histories,
a past that’s littered with
the hearts that break and bleed.
Let’s do away with all this
business of tortured souls,
‘cause now that I’ve got you
I can’t ever let you go.

The only song on this album NOT based on true stories.
Written as a duet between two dangerous lovebirds
in search of redemptive love and cleansing,
I was totally blown away when my then-co-worker and
friend Laura Imbruglia said she’d sing the female vocal part.
The original line was “then his dick will see my knee”, but Laura
changed it to “teeth”, purely because she misheard my guide vocal.
Bon and I both thought it was a better choice,
as it befit the violence of the song.
It’s intentionally “over the top” like a post-Tarantino love song.
I believe that this was intended to originally be the
opening track for “Newspapers, Records & Girlfriends”,
before coming in second last on “Dead Love Songs”.

KINETIC

I've been spinnin' round an' round
whilst standin' still.
What on Earth could it be?
Somethin' inside of me
waitin' dormant for my luck to change?
Well, here it comes smash in the face!

And I've been swept away with my
feet on the ground.
I chalk it all up to you,
not knowin' what I should do
in the world's best case scenario.
Just relax and then let go,
I'll be there in case ya didn't know

'cause I can't getcha out of my mind.
No, I can't getcha out of my mind.

The best way to end a break-up album
is with a song of utmost positivity.
I often don't write "happy" songs,
because it's too easy for them to come off as "trite".
To write a happy song that doesn't do that
is quite the challenge,
and one that I've found comes easier with age.
So yeah, the song is obviously about
finding new love after the turmoil of a break-up.
And this one definitely IS a true story!
This was also supposed to be on "N, R & G",
but can now be found on "DLS".

ZEE BEEP APE

(2000)

ARALDITE ME, APHRODITE

The first time I saw your eyes.
You took me by surprise.
The second time I saw your smile.
It made it all worthwhile.

This was totally unexpected.
Who'da thought we'd ever connect? Yeah, wow.
But it makes sense somehow.

The third time I felt your touch.
It almost made me blush.
The fourth time I felt your kiss.
It's somethin' I sure missed.

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Who'da thought we'd ever connect? Yeah, wow.
But it makes sense somehow.

I'm on cloud nine all the time.
Too much, too much fun
is never enough for anyone.
It's a Godsend, not a crime.

And it makes sense somehow,
that we connect, yeah, wow.
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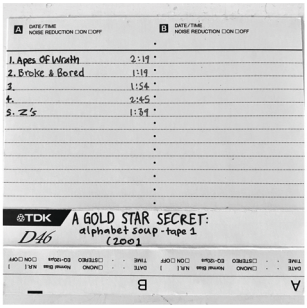

UNRELEASED “ALPHABET SOUP” ALBUM

(2001-2002)

APES OF WRATH

We're not leeching off the government.
How can we, when they're already taking a hundred and ten percent
of nothing in the first place? We can never get to third base
if first and second's swept away and into a tenement!

Take your alternate plans,
take your alternate plans and shove them up your arse.

Working class insinuates (that) there's work to be done,
but half the class is failing and I'm sure they'll make real good bums!

Take your alternate plans,
take your alternate plans and shove them up your arse.

There ain't no escapin' those apes of wrath.

We're not apes we're men, you see!
How can you stand the heat at a hundred and ten degrees?
So FUCK this game and your suspect rules
and we'll use these bats to show you who's who!

In 2001 Bon and I one day recorded 5 instrumentals
real quick and had the "great" idea of doing an album
of 26 short-ish songs and calling it "Alphabet Soup",
with song titles beginning with A through to Z.
"Apes Of Wrath" was a headline on a newspaper in Bon's kitchen,
and we thought it was a hilarious song title.
The other two songs I brought to the table
were "Broke & Bored" and "Z's", and Bon's were
"How To Take Your Life" and "Stomp 'N' Trip".
We never recorded vocals for them and
never wrote any more songs for the album either!
About a year later I had words for "Apes" and we started playing it live.
Terrible, pseudo-Fugazi political lyrics that I should never do!
At some point (probably around 2002) I also wrote lyrics
for the other too, but we never recorded them and
never played them live, so they're not included in this collection.
Reading them now, they really weren't up to scratch and
not worth recording at all. The writer's block was on it's way...

THE WHOLE THING IS POISONED!

(2003-2004)

SONG FOR PETER ARCHER

Run. Run a while.
Runnin' for to live what yr on about.
Come. Come inside,
in from the rain and the storm, and it's alright.
Go down the road.
Goin' off, I don't want you anymore.
Run. Run aside.
Runnin'. Run and know what yr wishin' for.

Peace. Peace of mind
only comes when yr out of yr head in a hole.
So it's what you want,
movin' away and ya go to the countryside.

You realised.
You realised.

With the fast approaching writer's block,
I revisited a method I used to do almost ten years prior:
recording song ideas into a tape player and
making vocal sounds ("words") on the spot.
I'd then go back and try to "translate" the sounds into words,
often not making a hell of a lot of sense!
The lyrics in this batch of songs aren't "great",
but they were a way of being (and staying) creative.
This was called "Song For Peter Archer" mainly
because of the vocal style and vibe of the song.
I think he did move to the countryside too.

INSIDE I CAN'T HEAR RAIN

Come on down and start a family.
Drop in, everyone around.
Charlie has gone to the bighouse.
What are you all gonna do?

Inside I can't hear rain.

Heaven is just a shelter
that you think you can fuck up.
Come on, around the rafters,
but you are not gettin' out.

Inside I can't hear rain.

Another set of lyrics sourced from improvisation,
followed by loose translation.
Asemic singing maybe? or SoundPo?
Anyway... it seems to be about Manson
and his Family and not liking rain.
And it's not very good at all.
It's a real step down from the "Dead Love Songs" lyrics.

I CAN'T SEE NO FUTURE

I can't see no future.
I can't see no future.
I can't see no future
in this song!

This is essentially an instrumental.
The shouted singing is right at the end.
Another song referencing the song itself,
and even making a joke of it.

THE SLEEPING PRINCE

Sleepin' prince
leaves his fingerprints
all over your restless frame.

Sleepin' prince
bleeds from his fingertips
and paints your lips aflame.

But you're not wakin' him,
'cause near enough is shakin' him,
for morning calls their own in their own time.

And you're not wakin' him,
'cause near enough is hatin' him,
but when the alarm sounds,
you're bound
to wake him up.
WAKE UP!

The only song from the "Poisoned" demos
where the lyrics were NOT improvised, but thought out.
Written for Lea, back when I used to be able to sleep in.
The title intentionally sounds like a children's book.

EMPATHY FOR AN ANGEL

Another night.
Came out and took shame.
Hate and I
resonate.
No sympathy
for the devils around me,
but empathy
for an angel.

Emotion (no emotion) spared? (scarred.)
Any emotion (no emotion) spared? (scarred.)
Any emotion (no emotion) spared? (scarred.)
Any emotion (no emotion) spared? (scarred.)

Come again.
Delivery in motion.
Accident
that I didn't see.
No sympathy
for the devils around me,
but empathy
for an angel.

Emotion (no emotion) spared? (scarred.)
Any emotion (no emotion) spared? (scarred.)
Any emotion (no emotion) spared? (scarred.)
Any emotion (no emotion) spared? (scarred.)

The final song written for "Poisoned"
contained a mix of improvisational and "thought out" lyrics.
It's probably the best of the improvised bunch,
as the translation kind of makes sense. Kind of.
This was recorded with no drums, but only recently Bon
alerted me to the fact that he DID record drums some time after!
Muscically it's referencing the vibe of Unwound's "Leaves Turn Inside You".
The "no sympathy" bit is a reference to the
original working title of el Mopa's "Done By Degrees".
More angels, devils, biblical references, etc.

I DON'T WANT ANYTHING FOR CHRISTMAS

(2003)

CHRISTMAS WISH LIST

What do you wish for this Christmas, my dear?
I'm hopin' that I'll give you somethin' this year.
'Cause we're gettin' older,
I'm jus' gettin' colder,
an' love's dryin' up in that well of my tears.

What do you wish for this Christmas, my dear?
I'm guessin' you're distressin' I'll forget again this year?
So, how about a boyfriend
earnin' shitloads in a high end
part of town, who owns a house, a car, n' things I don't have here?

What do you wish for this Christmas, my dear?
If you can't decide, then I got a few ideas:
here's my heart for your lovin',
my body for holdin',
an' if that all fails, here's a six pack of beer!

Written in December 2003 for Lea while she was at her work
Christmas party and I was home alone with a guitar & a dictaphone.
Highly influenced by Darren Hanlon's "Falling Aeroplanes",
even more so than with "Everything".
It was originally intended for the unreleased
"Newspapers, Records & Girlfriends" album,
and was recorded "properly" with Bon later (2004?)
for inclusion on Leigh Tran's excellent compilation
"I Don't Want Anything For Christmas", released in 2007.
It is unofficially the FINAL song A Gold Star Secret ever did.

EPILOGUE:
The last A Gold Star Secret show was in August 2004.
The 2 following Gold Star gigs were cancelled:
October 2004 became a solo show for me and
November 2004 became a solo show for Bon.
I also did 3 shows with Bon in 2004 as guest guitarist in the Cannanes.
Songwriting was essentially put on the backburner till March 2017,
although I played 2 covers at Bon & Kat's wedding in January 2008
and a Múm cover at Lea's book launch in September 2012.
My first "solo" gig back (with Bon!) was in June 2018.

CREDITS

Dead Love Songs
Front cover painting by Lea Dunstone.
Thanks also to Bon King & Rachael Hetherington.

Zee Beep Ape
Front cover photos taken by Bon King & Penny McBride.
Artwork by Bon King.

unreleased "Alphabet Soup" album
The Whole Thing Is Poisoned!
Thanks to Bon King.

I Don't Want Anything For Christmas
Front cover photo taken by Leigh Tran.
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a Dedorn Dog Book

Stories by A Gold Star Secret & friends: Volume 2

This collection compiles Geoff's lyrics to both his first solo album & the unfinished "fourth" A Gold Star Secret album (as well as a number of other songs from the period), in chronological order, recorded between 1999 and 2005.

"Dead Love Songs" was recorded between 1999-2005 and released digitally in 2013, with a physical release in 2023. Intended to be the third A Gold Star Secret album, it became Geoff's first solo album, filled out with songs from the projected fourth album "Newspapers, Records & Girlfriends". Bon's songs from albums #3 & #4 (and then some!) became the album "Zee Beep Ape" by the Baby Bees, released in 2006. Geoff wrote the words & sang "Araldite Me, Aphrodite" circa 2000.
Unfinished album "Alphabet Soup" yielded "Apes Of Wrath", recorded in 2001 & played live in 2002.
"The Whole Thing Is Poisoned!" was to be the next A Gold Star Secret album. Rough demos were recorded 2003-2004 but never completed. It was released "as is" digitally in 2013.
"Christmas Wish List" was originally recorded in 2003. It was re-recorded with Bon for the "I Don't Want Anything For Christmas" compilation, released in 2007.

Geoff Towner is a middle-aged, washed-up, has-been singer/songwriter/musician/artist/archivist/father/failure/dickhead who hates writing songs. His music has been likened to Will Oldham, Bill Callahan, Mark Kozelek, Jason Molina, Leonard Cohen, Robert Wyatt, Nick Cave & Bon Iver.

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